

Thomas Gassaway Watkins to Andrew Jackson, March 13, 1822, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

DR. THOMAS G. WATKINS TO JACKSON.1

1 Dr. Watkins lived at Milton, Albemarle Co., Va. See p. 145, *supra*, note 2.

Jonesboro, Tenn. , March 13, 1822.

. . . . On my return here I found several letters awaiting me from Virginia, two or three from Characters intimately acquainted and connected with some of the leaders of our Virginia policy. The next presidential election is a subject which occupies a prominent part in some of these, and I learn from them, that there the public mind seems as yet entirely unsettled, the question is considered premature, and there appears to be an unwillingness on the part of the state to stir a question, from which so much discord and diversity of opinion is likely to arise, the candidates are so numerous, and no one standing preeminently superior to the rest, that, as yet the public opinion can scarcely be said to be directed to any definite point. Some, perhaps unfriendly to the present incumbent, say, that these numerous candidates are encouraged to get the nation so completely bewildered, that they will agree to his reelection as the only means of allaying the ferment—and that this is his expectation. Be this as it may, I believe, that the reelection for a second term has become so completely a part of the constitution from custom and public opinion, that no one will dare in future to suffer himself to be named for a third, and if he were I am sure he wou'd be rejected with disdain.

I am satisfied that in the present instance Virginia wou'd not for that reason (if no other existed) support the present incumbent upon a new nomination—besides this, however,

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there is in his native state, a powerful party as yet without a head, or in array—silently but decidedly disapproving the aberration (from the old republican principles) which has manifested itself for the last five or six years—The excessive accumulation of offices, profuse expenditure of public money and annual increase of the national debt. The affectation of european and princely etiquette, where the president if he chooses can so decidedly give a tone to manners—the lust of office and the pride of power, about the seat of the General government, so utterly repugnant to the true sinews and spirit of our institutions, have sunk deep into the minds of both federalists and republicans of greater original simplicity of manners and principles. any circumstance which wou'd embody and array this party, wou'd call forth and display an opposition, as powerful as it wou'd be unexpected. it composes the soul and body of the State. If we wou'd preserve the original simplicity of our institutions and perpetuate this grand republic, we wou'd choose our presidents not for the splendour of their manners, but their simplicity and plainness—not for the eloquence of their haranguing, but the soundness of their judgment and their decision of character, not for their pliancy and amiable accomodation of the ten thousand particular wills and wishes that assail them on every side, but a firm, dignified and commanding resistance of every thing not founded in *right* , and plain solid *republican utility*.

I trust that the people on this momentous subject will take the business into their own consideration, and transact it among themselves. On such occasions if they do not learn to think and *act for themselves* they will be betrayed. but my enthusiastic nature and feelings have hurried me on farther than I had at first intended to have obtruded my thoughts on this interesting subject upon you.

The servant man I had thought of selling you I find we cannot dispose of untill we get back to Virginia—when his mistress is willing that I shou'd sell him. then I cou'd also furnish you a likely young woman slave 16 years old also, and if you cannot more readily supply yourself with the whole number you want, I wou'd engage to purchase them for you carefully in my neighbourhood and upon the best terms they cou'd be had, and deliver

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them to your agent and order without any charge but their original cost. in this way you might procure those known to be good and upon much better terms than of the traders. Wagg[ons re]turning from Baltimore might take them to Knoxville. It will give [me much] pleasure if I can serve you in it. If your agent chooses to take the [slave I] offered you can have him for the 500 dolls. Tennessee money still—off which [if I] sell him in Virginia to you his expences out to Knoxville shall be taken. I shall be happy to hear from you at *“Milton Albemarle Co. Virginia”*. with my friendly respects to Mrs. Jackson I am with great respect yr. friend and Obdt. servt.